

UNIT 1 - COMPARATIVE STUDIES OF THE WORLD RELIGIONS

Dr. S. S. Kapoor

LESSON 1.

1.1

Definition of a World religion:

A world religion is one which has a founder, a religious book of its own and a long history of its development

1.2

A table showing World religions:

The following religions fit in the above definition: (dates in descending order)

RELIGION	THE FOUNDER	THE SCRIPTURE/S	DATE OF THE START OF ITS HISTORY
Sikhism	Guru Nanak	Guru Granth Sahib	1469 A.D
Islam	Hazrat Mohammed	Qoran	570 A.D
Christianity	Jesus Christ	Bible	4 B.C
Buddhism	Gautama Buddha	Tri-pitaka	563 B.C
Jainism	Mahavir	Angas	599 B.C
Hinduism	Hindu sages	Vedas	1200 B.C
Judaism	Moses	Torah	1250 B.C

1.3

A summary of the World religions:

Sikhism is the youngest of world religions, whereas Judaism is the oldest religion amongst them. The population of these two religions is about 18/20 million each. Israel, formerly Palestine, is the homeland of Jews and was handed over to the Jews by the British in 1948, when they gave independence to Palestine. The Jews have fought many wars with the Palestinians and the neighbouring Arab counties to maintain their sovereignty.

Punjab, a northern state of British India is the homeland of Sikhs. It was being ruled by the Sikhs when the British conquered it in 1849 and made it a part of British India. Punjab was liberated in 1947 along with other Indian states. Since then it has been a part of Federal India. The demand of a separate homeland for the Sikhs, after the fall of Punjab to the British in 1849 and the merger of the state into the Federal India in 1947, has remained unrealised for numerous political reasons.

1.4

Hinduism, the dominant religion of the Indian sub-continent dates back about 3000 years. It has no specific founder, though the names of Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva and many incarnations of Vishnu viz., Ram and Krishan are taken to be the founders of the faith. Regarding the Hindu scriptures, in addition to Vedas, the Ramayan and Bhagvad Geeta are also believed to be the holy books of the Hindus. There are about 800 million Hindus in the world.

1.5

Jainism and Buddhism spread almost in the same time period. Their prophets were born in the Greater Bihar area and both religions are silent about God. Regarding the spread of the two religions, whereas Buddhism moved away from India and spread in China and Japan, Jainism remained in India and, to some extent, merged back into Hinduism, the faith it had come from. Of all the world religions the population of Jains is the minimum. There are about 3 million Jains living in various parts of India. The population of Buddhists is however approximately 1,000 million.

1.6

Christianity is the most populous religion of the world. Its missionaries are found all over the globe. Most of the advanced countries of the world viz., USA, European Union, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand are Christian dominated countries. There are approximately 2.500 million Christians in the world.

1.7

Like Sikhism, Islam is also a post Christian era religion. It is the second most populous religion of the world. Its population is about half of Christians i.e., 1,300 million. Almost the whole of the Middle East, Africa, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Indonesia are Muslim populated areas.

1.8

Population of the World religion at a glance (in ascending order):

Religion	Population
Jainism	3,000,000
Sikhism	18,000,000
Judaism	20,000,000
Hinduism	800,000,000
Buddhism	1,000,000,000
Islam	1,200,000,000
Christianity	2,500,000,000

LESSON 2

2.1

What is religion ?

2.1.1

Religion is a science which discovers the suspense and wonders of nature. Since the dawn of history, the scientists have been working around the

clock, to unearth the secrets of nature. They have achieved many successes, and that is what God wanted. He has created suspense and wonders and has given man a way to discover them and then to utilise them for the good of humanity. When all the suspense and wonders are uncovered, the world comes to a halt and then God recreates another world, new suspense and other wonders. This is how the universe was designed.

2.1.2

The books written on and about religion are known as scriptures. They are revealed books. They describe all the wonders of the world and the way they can be discovered. They also discuss the code of morality and explain the basic rules of founding a perfect society.

2.1.3

Religion also discusses the powers and personality of God and the ways he can be realised; where he lives and how he regulates the whole cosmology.

2.1.4

When nature is discovered, material goods are produced. These goods then help to improve the standard of living of man. The more of these goods a man possesses the richer he is known. The goal of man is both to be rich (discover the nature and possess the results) and to be happy. Material goods give affluence but not necessarily happiness. Happiness is not hidden in the wonders of nature. This treasure God has kept with him. To have a part of this treasure the man has to communicate directly with God. The modes and means of this communication are also explained in the scriptures.

2.1.5

The study of religion is an essential part of a man's mental development. It teaches him discipline and rules to live a perfect life.

2.2

Why religion ?

In addition to the wonders and suspense of nature, God has kept many treasures with him e.g., happiness, success, power, satisfaction and honours etc. To achieve these, a man has to live his life according to his own religious beliefs. Without God's grace these treasures cannot be achieved. Religion teaches the mode and manners to invoke the grace of God and achieve happiness and honour of life.

2.3

The emergence of a new religion:

The emergence of a religion is the result of some serious social exploitation and political injustice. It is born to revolt and fight against these nasty evils.

LESSON 3

The basic Prayers:

A prayer means giving words to your thoughts when you are meditating on the name of God.

3.1

The Sikh prayer:

The basic Sikh prayer is the recitation of a hymn called "Mool mantar". This hymn is the first hymn recorded in Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book of the Sikhs . It reads:

"There is one God, who is the truth (permanent reality), the creator, devoid of fear and enmity, immortal, unborn, self-existent, great and bountiful."

All eternal treasures are achieved with his grace. (Guru Granth Sahib, page 1)

3.2

The Muslim prayer:

The common prayer of a Muslim repeated many times a day is:

"In the name of Allah, the merciful, the compassionate,
praise be to Allah, the lord of the worlds,
the merciful, the compassionate.
King on the day of judgment.
To You we serve and on you we call for help.
Guide us on the straight path,
the path of those to whom you have been gracious,
not of those upon whom anger falls, or those who go astray."

(The opening, Chapter one of Koran)

3.3

The Buddhist prayer:

Just as an arrow-maker makes straight his arrow, the wise man makes straight his trembling, unsteady thought which is difficult to guard and difficult to restrain.
Let the wise man guard his thoughts, which is difficult to perceive, which is extremely subtle, which wanders at will.
Thoughts which are well guarded are the bearer of happiness.

3.4

The Chinese Buddhist prayer:

You are the perfect master, you shine upon all things and all men,
As gleaming moonlight plays upon a thousand waters at the same time,
You are the great physician for a sick and impure world,
In pity giving invitation to the paradise of the West.

3.5

The Jain prayer:

We praise the Lord, who was the first king, the first ascetic, the first head
of a congregation.
May there be good fortune from the holy Mahavira's eyes, whose pupils
are wide with compassion even for sinful people, moist with a trace of tears.

3.6

The Christian prayer:

Our father, who is in heaven,
With the meditation on your name, your kingdom comes;
Your command will operate, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive them that trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
The kingdom is yours, the power and glory are yours,
for ever and ever.

3.7

The Hindu Vedic prayer:

Hear this call of mine; be gracious to us,
Longing for help, I cry for you,
You, O wise God, are lord of all, you are king of earth and heaven;
Hear me, and shower your prosperity on me.

3.8

The Jewish prayer:

O lord, you open my lips, and my mouth shall sing your praises,
We seek your blessings, O lord our God and God of our fathers,
God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob, the great, mighty
and revered God, the most high God, who bestows loving kindness and
possesses all things;
Who remembers the pious deeds of the patriarchs, and in love will
bring a redeemer to their children's children. His name is the greatest.

LESSON 4

THE PROPHETS:

4.1

The world religions have grown on the text of the ideas and teachings of their founders. They were all messengers of God and brought similar messages for mankind. The scholars subsequently, developed and analysed their ideas and teachings, codified them and wrote them in a new book and called it a scripture.

4.2

From the prayers given in chapter three one theory clearly emerges, that is, that all religious prayers are similar in context, they differ only in words.

4.3

All founders were born as human beings, they all lived and suffered like common man and died when their missions were complete. Most of the prophets were married and had families. At some stage of their lives they were either farmers or traders. They were all reformers. They grew up in a religious environment and inherited ideas from their predecessors. They accepted some and developed and chiselled them and rejected others which they thought were spurious. With the ideas they accepted they mixed their own original thoughts and messages brought from God.

4.4

Except for Hindu religion, all other religions have a specific founder, who is credited with the founding of that religion. Perhaps the antiquity of the Hindu religion has made it quite difficult to name one single person as the founder of that religion.

4.5

4.5.1

The founder of Sikh religion: **Guru Nanak Dev**

Guru Nanak Dev is the founder of the youngest of the world religions. He was born in 1469 in Talwandi, now known as Nankana Sahib, situated

about 48 miles westward of Lahore, Pakistan. He was the son of a revenue officer. His father also had many acres of farming land and many hundred cattle. Guru Nanak Dev was married and had two sons. He had his schooling at Talwandi and learnt Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, Hindu and Muslim scriptures, music and arithmetic. For many years, after leaving school, he helped his father in the fields and with the cattle. Then for few years he went to Sultanpur to live with his sister, Babe Nanki. There, he accepted the employment of a store keeper in the local government offices.

At the age of 38 he had a vision and was commanded by God himself to go on missionary journeys to spread the divine message. He was chosen by God to be his latest messenger. During the next 14 years Guru Nanak travelled as far as Mecca in the west, Bangladesh in the east, Tibet in the north and Ceylon in the south to spread the divine message. During his journeys he met heads of most of the known faiths of that period and had religious discourses with them; after the meeting they bowed to him for his divinity and wisdom. The names of Emperor Babur of India, King Shivnabh of Ceylon, Gorakhnath of Gorakh-math and Pir Dastgir of Iraq are few important names amongst them.

At the age of 52 he founded a new town Kartarpur on the banks of river Ravi, and lived there for the last 18 years of his life. He established first Sikh temple over there and called it Dharamsal. He tilled his own fields and grazed his own cattle. In the morning and in the evening he taught the inhabitants the glory of God.

Guru Nanak taught people that there was one God and that all the humans were equal. He forbade the worship of idols, tombs and graves. He said that to realise God one must recite his glories and perform noble deeds.

He died at the age of 70 at Kartarpur. He was revered both by Muslims and Hindus. They both claimed that he was their redeemer.

4.5.2

The founder of Islam: **Hazrat Mohammed**

Hazrat Mohammed was born in 570 in Mecca. His father Abdullah died before his birth and his mother Amina died when he was six. He was looked after by his grandfather, who died two years later. He was then left in the care of his uncle Abu Talib. Mohammed had no schooling. At the age of 25 he got employment with a rich widow Khadija, who was 15 years senior to him. He soon married her and had seven children from her, two boys who died in infancy and four daughters of whom Fatima is memorable for her marriage to Ali the fourth Caliph (successor of Mohammed), other three died in their young ages. Khadija died at the age of 67. Three years after the death of Khadija, Mohammed married Sawda a widow and also became betrothed to Aisha, a seven year old daughter of Abu Bakr, a close friend of his. A few years later, when Mohammed and Abu Bakr emigrated to Medina, Aiysha became Mohammed's bride at the request of Abu Bakr. Aisha grew up to be a lady of great wisdom and knowledge. Mohammed then married Umma Habiba, a divorcee from Abyssinia, Hafsa, a daughter of Umar a close companion of Mohammed and Umm Salama, a widow from Medina. His last wife was Zaynab the wife of his servant Zayd, whom he had brought up as his own son. When Zayd divorced Zaynab, God commanded Mohammed to marry her.

Mohammed got divine vision when he was 40. God spoke to him in a cave at mount Hira where he often went for worship. He began to preach what God commanded him to say. The first converts to his faith were Khadija, Zayd, Ali and Abu Bakr.

Mohammed migrated to Medina in 622 to escape persecution in Mecca. There he decided to launch a Jihad, the holy war, to liberate Mecca from the domain of pagans. He fought many battles with them, initially he lost but in 630 he attacked Mecca with ten thousand men and took it after only small opposition.

In 632, at the age of 62 he died. He had suffered from abdominal trouble for some time. In 632 he contacted high fever and died in the lap of his favorite wife Aisha.

His revelations are preserved in Koran which is the holy book of the Muslims. He preached that there was one God and Mohammed was his messenger and that all humans were equal.

4.5.3

The founder of Christian religion: **Jesus Christ**

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in 4 BC. Mary and Joseph, parents of Jesus, were already engaged to be married when Mary got a vision of angels who told her that she would soon conceive a son in her virginity, who would be the son of God. Jesus grew up in Nazareth, his parents' home town in Galilee. Joseph was a carpenter and Jesus helped him in his profession.

In 26 AD Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist, who said that the kingdom of God was near and the people who would repent would have their sins washed away by baptism in the river Jordan. John was arrested and executed. Jesus took up his work and went preaching into the lakeside towns of Galilee, saying that the Kingdom of God was at hand, repent and believe the good news.

In 28 AD he entered Jerusalem with his twelve disciples to preach the message of good news. Here he was betrayed by one of his disciples Judas, who gave his identity to the Roman soldiers. On the complaint of Jewish religious leaders, Jesus was charged for committing blasphemy, was arrested and crucified by the orders of the Roman Governor, Pontious Pilate.

Jesus died in the young age of 32. He was not married. Three days after his burial he rose from the dead. The Bible, the holy book of the Christians, records nine appearances of Jesus to the disciples after his resurrection.

Fifty days later, the disciples were filled with the spirit of God, and went on to declare that God had made Jesus both lord and Christ (messenger). The Christian church began from that day and spread all over the world.

The teachings of Jesus are contained in the Gospels. He revealed and preached the love of God to man.

4.5.4

The founder of Jain religion: **Mahavir**

Mahavir was born in 599 B.C in Vaisali, about thirty miles north of Patna, the capital of Bihar. His real name was Vardhamana, He was the last of the 24 Jinas, the 'conquerors', of the Jain religion. His father was a local ruler. Mahavir grew up like a prince in his parental home. He was married and had a daughter.

His parents were already devoted to the Jain religion and its strict rules. After confession of their sins, they stopped doing all social or household activities else they might do something wrong and bring harm or evil. They rejected all food and fasted to death

When Mahavir was 30 he left his home and family and joined a group of wandering holy men. He abandoned everything, even his clothes. For twelve years he was on a missionary tour. He went from village to village, spending only one night in a village. While in villages, most of his time was spent in deep meditation.

At the age of 43, light came to him. He was sitting cross-legged when the truth dawned to him and he saw all the wonders of nature, the heavens, the hell and all the hidden treasures of God.

For the remaining 30 years he preached and converted many disciples to his faith. He had a council of 11 close disciples

In 527 B.C at the age of 73 he died His sermons are collected in Angas, the holy book of the Jains.

4.5.5

The founder of Buddhism: **Buddha**

Buddha was born in 563 B.C in Bihar, about 160 km north of Hindu holy city of Varanashi (old name Benares). His real name was Sidarth. His father was a king. He was warned not to let Sidarth see anything of pain, sickness, death and renunciation, so he made sure that Sidarth was kept within the palace walls surrounded by every luxury of life. Sidarth loved sports and horse riding. He also learned archery. He was married to a beautiful princess and had a lovely son.

When he was 29 years old he managed to go beyond the palace walls and saw the four signs (the four passing sights) his father feared the most: an old man with wrinkles all his face, bent forward and walking with a stick; a sick man lying on the foot path, unattended with flies all over his face; a corpse being carried on a cot, followed by a group of mourners and a monk who had renounced the world. These signs adversely affected Sidarth's mind. He came back to the palace, abandoned everything, except one robe, bade good-bye to his weeping wife, son and parents and went out as a homeless wanderer in search of true causes of suffering and pain.

He went from one Hindu teacher to another, but without satisfaction. He did all the penances and fastings but realised nothing.

He continued his search until he reached the town of Gaya and sat down under a pipal tree. He was determined to sit there until truth came to him. The evil spirit of Mara tempted him and frightened him but he did not move. Then the great awakening occurred and he became a Buddha, an 'enlightened one'. In the light he saw the mystery of existence, the causes of suffering and pain and the means to cure them. He saw the four noble truths that lead to the destruction of suffering and the way to Nirvana, the peace beyond this world.

Buddha was now over 35 years old, and for the next 45 years he went from place to place teaching and gathering disciples around him He delivered his first sermon in the deer park of Sarnath. His son and wife also became his disciples. At first Buddha refused to allow women in his order, but at the request of his chief disciple Ananda he allowed them to become nuns with an order of their own.

Buddha died at the age of over 80 after eating some poisonous mushrooms.

4.5.6

The founder of Hinduism: **The sages**

There is no historical founder of the Hindu religion. There have been many sages and it is believed that the Hindu scriptures were revealed by God to them

Hindus believe in the trinity of God. They call them Brahma - the creator; Vishnu - the preserver and Shiv - the destroyer. Their consorts are also worshipped and so are their incarnations. It is believed that to date there had been 24 incarnations of Vishnu. Two most important of his incarnations were Ram and Krishna. Both belonged to the princely caste of Kshatriya, were married and had children.

Ram was born in the 'Treta' period, whereas Krishan was born in the 'Dwapar' period. The teachings of Krishna are preserved in Bhagvad Gita, whereas the life of Ram is contained in the book of Ramayan.

4.5.7

The founder of Judaism,: **Moses**

Moses was born in Egypt in 1200 BC. That was a very critical period for the Jews, then called Israelites or Hebrews. The Pharaoh of Egypt had ordered the death of all Jewish baby boys, when Moses was born. Moses's mother hid him in a basket and flowed him in a river. The Pharaoh's daughter found him floating and adopted him as her son.

The word Judaism comes from the name of their original Middle Eastern kingdom of Judah. The story of the origin of the Jews goes back to 2000 BC and is associated with a farmer called Abraham. Jews believe that God made a covenant with him to make his descendants a great nation. As a result Abraham left his homeland Ur near the Persian Gulf and moved towards Canaan, the promised holy land. Abraham's son Jacob had twelve sons, who later founded the twelve tribes of Israel.

Then there was a great famine in Canaan and all Jews moved to Egypt. That is where Moses was born. Although it is recognised that the putative sources of Judaism go back to Abraham, the organiser of Judaism and its decisive and pivotal point was Moses.

Moses grew up like a prince in the Pharaoh's palace. When he was a young man, he saw an Egyptian soldier torturing a Hebrew, he became enraged and killed the soldier with his sword, left Egypt and fled across the Red Sea. While in flight from Egypt he married the daughter of a priest Jethro. God then commanded Moses to go to Mount Sinai and there he revealed himself to him in a burning bush. God then ordered him to return to Egypt to bring out his people.

Moses went back to Egypt and pleaded with the Pharaoh to release his people from the slave-bondage. The Pharaoh was unwilling, but after God sent 'plagues' of floods, locusts and diseases he let them go. The Hebrews crossed the marshes at the north end of the Red Sea, where God had divided the sea into two halves.

Then Moses led his people to Mount Sinai. He climbed up to talk to God and returned with the Ten Commandments engraved on stone tablets These were the laws for the new born Jewish nation.

Although he had made a nation out of slave people, and had given them a complete religion and code of laws, Moses did not live to lead them

into the Promised Land (Israel). After forty years of wandering between Egypt and Canaan, he died in about 1100 BC at the age of eighty.

LESSON 5

THE HOLY BOOKS:

5.1

All the world's major religions have their own holy books. Almost all these books, except the Sikh holy book, were written many years after the death of their prophets. However, the Sikh holy book, perhaps is the only scripture in the world, which was written and signed by their prophet in his own life time. This makes the Sikh holy book a unique scripture of history.

As all prophets had come from the same Deity, their messages were similar though different in words, metaphors and emphasis. The scholars and the wise men who had gathered around them, later developed their prophets' thoughts according to their own level of intelligence, richness of their languages, the needs of the society in which they were heard and the depth of the comprehension of their followers. These parameters then highlighted the divergence of the meaning in their analysis and interpretation of prophet's thoughts.

The subject matter of all the holy books is also similar: the study of God and his universe, the means to realise him, the rules of morality and the hymns of his praises.

Though all the holy bookies are revered by their followers, the Sikhs and Jews show an extra special respect for their holy books. Unlike other religions, Sikhism and Judaism keep their holy books with great grandeur and style. Their books are ceremoniously opened in the morning and closed in the evening. They wrap and cover their books in clean and colourful sheets and use special cushions and stools for their day time opening and night time rest.

The only religion wherein the holy book is treated as a living Guru is the Sikh religion. They call their holy book as Guru Granth Sahib and give it all the respect which would be given to a living Guru, short of worship.

Many religions believe that the word written in the holy books was the word spoken by God and revealed through their prophets. They believe that the author of their holy books is God himself. All religious books were written in the classical language of that period and the region. The important languages used in these books however are: Hebrew, Sanskrit, Pali, Greek, Arabic and Gurmukhi.

5.1.1

The holy book of the Sikhs: Guru Granth Sahib

Guru Granth Sahib was first compiled by Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru of the Sikh during 1601-1604, and later revised by Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and last Guru of the Sikhs in 1704. In the edition prepared by Guru Arjan, the tenth Master added the hymns of Guru Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru of the Sikhs.

Guru Granth Sahib is a voluminous book and contains 1430 pages. It contains the hymns composed by six Sikh Gurus (first five Gurus and the ninth Guru), 15 saints (12 Hindus and 3 Muslim) of both Guru period and pre-Guru period, 3 disciples (Baba Sundar, Mardana and Satta & Balwand) and 17 bards (court poets). Guru Arjan had made the first selection of the hymns out of many thousand submitted to him, by various Hindu and Muslim religious organisations, for inclusion in the Granth. He finally selected only those hymns which met the ideology and philosophy of the Sikh religion.

The first hand-written copy of the Granth, called Adi Granth, and signed by Guru Arjan is in the custody of Sodhis of Kartarpur (near Jallandar), Punjab, India.

The second hand-written copy prepared during the times of Guru Gobind Singh was taken by Abdali, an invader from Afghanistan, to Kabul. Its whereabouts are not known.

The version of the Guru Granth Sahib which is found in the Gurdwaras and the Sikh households is the revised version prepared by Guru Gobind Singh.

Guru Granth is a treasure of ancient Indian and foreign languages viz., Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Braj, Lehandi, Sindhi and Panjabi, and classical Indian music. Most of the hymns are grouped under the musical metre of the Indian classical tradition.

It is believed that Guru Gobind Singh bestowed upon the Granth, the title of the Guru, before his death at Nander in 1708. Since then Granth Sahib has been revered by the Sikhs as the living Guru of the Sikhs.

In every Gurdwara and in Sikh households where a copy of Guru Granth is kept, Guru Granth Sahib is ceremoniously opened in the morning. It is put on a decorated small bed (2' x 4'), underneath are put three small pillows and is covered by four colourful sheets (2 sheets of 1.5 metres square and 2 sheets half of that size): one big sheet is put under the Granth, two small sheets are hung on the left and right hand sides of the Granth and last large sheet is used to cover it. At night time the Granth is respectfully wrapped in a white sheet (1.5 metres square) and put at a proper resting place covered by another sheet.

The devotees must clean their hands and feet, cover their heads and take off their shoes and socks when they come in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib. Every Sikh must bow and show his respect to the Granth.

5.1.2

The holy book of the Muslims: The Qoran

Qoran is the holy scripture of Muslims. For them it is the infallible word of God, a manuscript of a tablet preserved in heaven, revealed to Prophet Mohammed by the Angel Gabriel. Except in the opening verses and some passages in which the Prophet or the Angel speaks in the first person, the speaker throughout is God. The time period of total revelation is about 23 years. After Mohammed's death his successor, Abu Bakar, appointed Zaid, an adopted son of Mohammed, to collect and collate the sayings of Mohammed. About twenty years later, the third Caliph Othman, finding that there were differences in various copies of Qoran, gave orders for an official version to be made. Once again, Zaid was asked to do it.

Qoran is written in Arabic. It has 114 chapters (suras). The longest chapters come first, reducing gradually till the short ones are reached. Some of these are headed Mecca and some Medina, indicating that they were revealed to Mohammed when he lived in Mecca or Medina. The chapters of Qoran have names rather than numbers (in translations they are numbered), according to some person or thing mentioned in them e.g., Abraham, Mary, Bee .

The Qoran preaches the oneness of God and emphasises divine mercy and forgiveness. God is almighty and all-knowing, and though compassionate towards his creatures He is stern in retribution He enjoys justice and honesty, kindness to the poor, orphans, widows and the homeless. The most important duties are unshaken faith in God and his apostle. Prayers, fasting, almsgiving and pilgrimage to Mecca is compulsory.

Muslims wrap Qoran in clean sheet and open it on a specially built wooden rack. All Muslims should be able to read Qoran in Arabic.

5.1.3

The holy book of the Jews: The Jewish Bible

The Jewish Bible consists of 24 books divided into three parts: the Law (Torah), the Prophets and the Writings. Torah is composed of the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. These were said to have been written by Moses.

The Genesis deals with the beginning of the universe and early life on earth; Exodus describes how the Israelites escaped from the slavery in Egypt; Leviticus lays down rules on the jobs of priests and how to deal with sacrifices and leprosy; Numbers deals with history from the times Jews left Mount Sinai until they approached Canaan, the promised land, and how Moses built them into a nation; Deuteronomy reviews the events of the earlier books and lays down the rules of life and morality.

Torah is a highly honoured scripture of the Jews. It sums up the learning, wisdom and love of God which is involved in their faith. The Torah scrolls used in the synagogues are hand written on parchment. It is wrapped in very expensive silken sheets and kept in an Ark. The Jews show their respect by kissing the scriptures.

The Jewish Bible is written in Hebrew and is in prose.

5.1.4

The holy book of the Christians: The Bible

The Christian Bible includes the Bible of the Jews. Thus this is the only religion in the world which reveres the scripture of another religion like its own holy book.

The Christians call the Jewish Bible as the Old Testament and the Christian Bible as the New Testament.

The Christian Bible is divided into: four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, 21 letters and the book of Revelations.

The Gospels record Jesus' life and teachings as narrated by four of his followers. The first book was compiled by Mark, then by Matthew and Luke. The fourth book written by John is believed to be compiled at the end of the first century..

The text of the Bible is in prose and is in the form of stories and parables. The Gospels contain the teachings of Jesus: the Good news that the kingdom of God was near, that Father was all merciful who forgave men their sins and sent good to all alike and the healing stories. John's book starts each chapter with a story about Jesus and then a commentary on it.

The story of the awakening in the followers of Jesus on the day of Pentecost is the subject matter of the Book of Acts. After the crucifixion of Jesus the disciples were in despair, but it was changed into hope when they had seen Jesus risen from the dead. The teachings of Jesus were preached by Peter and his companions and later Paul joined them and the Gospel was taken out of Palestine far into the known world.

The Epistles are letters sent by Paul and others to churches like Rome, Corinth etc, and friends such as Timothy and Philemon. They explain Christian beliefs. They teach faith in Jesus as the Christ and as the son of God.

The book of Revelation was written under the stress of the persecution of Christians by Nero and other Roman emperors. Christians refused to worship idols or statues of the emperors and so they were persecuted and killed.

In Christianity the focal point of prayers is Jesus rather than Bible. The original Bible was written in Greek and the its pages depend on the size and font of the book.

5.1.5

The holy book of the Hindus: Bhagvad Gita

This book contains the sermons given by Lord Krishna to Arjan, the hero of Mahabharat, in the battlefield at Kurukhestra. It is one of the world's longest poems. It consists of about two hundred and twenty thousand lines or nearly three million words. It was compiled by Rishi Vyas.

This epic commands personal devotion to a personal god. This form of life and prayers is called Bhakti.

The text of Bhagvad Gita is the relationship of man with God, the duties of humankind, the meaning of both life and death, the constant war between good and evil and the theory of karma

The original poem was written in Sanskrit. The devout Hindus start their day with the recitation of verses from Gita. Gita is treated as a holy book and is kept with great esteem and respect in a Hindu household.

A few selected verses of Gita are also recited at the time of a Hindu cremation.

5.1.6

The holy book of Southern Buddhists: Tripitaka

This book is divided into three parts called Baskets. The original texts written in Pali have long since been lost and the earliest surviving fragments

date from 250 B.C and are found in stone monuments put up by the Buddhist emperor Ashoka.

The first Basket is called the Vinaya Basket (Discipline basket). It contains the rules for monks and nuns.

For nearly 20 years after the enlightenment no rules were made for the Sanghas (the order of monks and the nuns). Subsequently as occasion arose, the Buddha promulgated rules for the future development of the Sanghas. It contains the following five books:

- @. Major offences
- a. Minor offences
- b. Greater section
- c. Lesser section
- d. Epitome

The second Basket is called Sutta Pitaka and contains the sermons and discourses delivered by Buddha to both Sanghas and the ordinary people. This basket consists of five collections:

- @. Collection of long discourses
- a. Collection of middle-length discourses
- b. Collection of kindred sayings
- c. Collection of gradual sayings.
- d. Smaller collections.

The fifth collection is divided into fifteen books.:

- 0. Shorter texts
- i. The Way of Truth
- ii. Paeans of joy
- iii. "Thus said" Discourses
- iv. Collected Discourses
- v. Stories of celestial mansions
- vi. Stories of Petas
- vii. Psalms of the brethren
- viii. Psalms of the sisters
- ix. Birth stories of the Bodhisatta
- x. Expositions
- xi. Book on Analytical knowledge
- xii. Lives of Arahants
- xiii. History of the Buddha
- xiv. Modes of conduct.

The third Basket is called Abhidamma Pitaka (Higher Teaching Basket). It contains long explanations and comments on Buddha's teaching. It is book of profound philosophy of the Buddha's teaching in contrast to the simpler discourses in the Sutta Basket. It is composed of the following seven works:

- 0. Classification of Dhammas
- i. Divisions
- ii. Discourse on Elements
- iii. The Book on individuals
- iv. Points of controversy
- v. The Book of pairs
- vi. The Book of casual relations.

The original language of these scriptures was Pali and is written in a mixture of prose and poetry. The Buddhists show respect to this book, but the focal point of their prayers is the image of Buddha rather than the scriptures.

5.1.7

The holy book of the Jains: Angas

Like both Hinduism and Buddhism, the teaching of Mahavir were passed on by memory from one generation to another generation. The book of Angas, meaning limb of Mahavir was first collated and compiled in fifth century A.D Even so there are not very many old manuscripts that still remain.

It is said that originally there were twelve Angas and the twelfth one was lost. There remain eleven Angas, which include the principal Jain teachings, lives of the saints, and monastic and moral rules. Like Buddhists the focal point of Jain prayers is the image of Mahavir rather than the Books of Angas.

The language of Angas is Ardhamagadhi.